

Meeting Notes
Tenant Work Group
Monday, February 2, 2009
6:30-8:30pm
Executive Conference Room
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Work Group Members in attendance: Matt Losak (Chair), Chuck Short, Zack Fried, Rick Nelson, Dale Tibbitts, Guy Johnson, Maureen Ross, Harrietta Kelly, Felicia Eberling
Via Conference Call: Parag Khandhar

Staff participants: Patrice Cheatham, DHCA; Megan Moriarty, IMPACT Silver Spring

Agenda

- Call to Order
- Review of previous meeting's minutes
- Committee Work Plans
- Next steps on tenant advocacy
- Forming field events subcommittee
- Reports on surveys and website
- Scheduling a day for code review
- Public Comment

Notes:

Maureen Ross called the meeting to order at 6:30pm in Matt Losak's absence. The previous meeting's minutes were reviewed and approved. The order of agenda items was changed since some members had not yet arrived.

The group discussed setting a date to meet with the County Attorney and representative from the Office of Landlord-Tenant Affairs to review the code. The Feb. 24 meeting was changed to Feb. 25, followed by Mar. 4. Both dates will be offered as possibilities to review the code. Dale Tibbitts recommended everyone read the Landlord-Tenant Handbook (in addition to the code already distributed) before this meeting. Patrice Cheatham will email the link to access it on the web to the group. Dale requested a list of common cases before the Landlord-Tenant Commission from Rick Nelson.

The group then discussed the Committee work plans.

Committee 1: Tenant Security and Affordability

Guy Johnson reviewed the group's work plan that includes covering five priority areas: foreclosure crisis, transit-oriented development, leases, renting vs. ownership, rental costs. The committee will prepare a bibliography for each issue and sub-topics and present policy proposals for each priority topic (see appended work plan). The committee will re-present the work plan at the next meeting with task assignments. Rick explained the

County has no data on renters being displaced by foreclosures, even though they have anecdotal evidence. Zack Fried suggested contacting Delta Associates for that information.

Committee 2: Code Update and Enforcement

Dale reported the committee will email a work plan to the group before the next meeting.

Committee 3: Landlord-Tenant Communication and Tenant Advocacy

Patrice reviewed the group's work plan, which includes the following priority issues: communication between renters and landlords and the County; language barriers; tenant education on rights and responsibilities; accessing available resources; tenant advocacy structures and best practices; lease language (see appended work plan). Marc Elrich informed the group that Takoma Park has a simple language lease that the committee may want to look at. Rick suggested this committee meet with the OLTA representatives before they come to discuss the code and brief them on the group's work to date. At the next meeting the committee will provide a more detailed work plan with delegations and due dates.

Committee 4: Seniors and Special Needs

Maureen explained the three priorities of the committee are: safe and secure housing for seniors (including access to services and transportation), building codes and ways to address rent increases for renters living on a fixed income. Maureen will email a work plan to the group before the next meeting. The committee will use existing reports and research in their analysis. Marc noted there is a tax credit for renters, but that it goes to owners now, not the renters.

The group agreed to vote on the work plans at the next meeting.

Next, the group discussed the possible forms an institutionalized version of this work group could take. Options discussed included: an office of tenant advocacy within the government; an independent tenant advocacy non-profit; a volunteer committee convened by the County; a quasi-governmental tenant advocacy group; an independent tenant organizing non-profit. Committee 3 will research the options and present their findings on best practices at the next meeting. Other discussion focused on possible revenue streams (increasing licensing fees, tenant donations) and the need for organizers in addition to advocates (based on the Takoma Park experience).

The group discussed planning for the two public meetings that have been scheduled: Mar. 18, Up County Regional Center; and Mar. 30, East County Regional Center. Megan noted there is a conflict with a rescheduled Council Town Hall meeting on the 18th. The group agreed to cancel the meeting Up County on the 18th and instead meet with a group of seniors at Holiday Park during the afternoon. The ad hoc committee to plan these sessions will be: Matt, Megan, Chuck, Maureen and Harrietta.

Chuck reported that Alice is working with a firm to do a survey for approximately \$3,000, with the County covering the printing and postage costs. Matt reported the website is up and will email the link to the group.

There was no public comment. Matt adjourned the meeting at 8:30pm.

Upcoming Meetings:

Wednesday, February 11, 6:30 pm., County Executive's conference room

Wednesday, February 25, 6:30 pm., County Executive's conference room

Wednesday, March 4, 6:30 pm., County Executive's conference room

Committee 1 - Tenant Security and Affordability

Committee objectives

List of priority issues

1. Foreclosure Crisis (Complete by February 13th)
 - a. Rights of renters in foreclosed homes in Montgomery County (by 2/6)
 - b. Available local statistics (by 2/6)
 - c. Tenant notification requirements for landlords who want to sell / have sold (by 2/13)
 - d. National responses: pending legislation, best practices (by 2/13)
2. Transit-Oriented Development (Complete by March 6th)
 - a. Overview of Purple Line plans and expanded Bus Line plans (by 2/13)
 - b. Impact of transit development on housing stock (by 2/20)
 - c. Impact of transit development on property values and rents (by 2/20)
 - d. Possibility for tenant displacement (by 2/27)
 - e. Condo Conversion (by 2/27)
 - f. Examples of transit oriented development: local and national (by 3/6)
3. Leases (Complete by March 27th)
 - a. automatic renewals vs month-to-month: benefits and problems (by 3/12)
 - b. Chart comparison between under lease and month-to-month: (by 3/27)
 - i. Possibility of rent increases (by 3/20)
 - ii. Associated fees and costs (by 3/20)
 - iii. Eviction and use of courts: rights and remedies (by 3/27)
 1. Retaliatory eviction
 2. Harassment
 3. No-fault / just-cause evictions
 - iv. Sense of security (by 3/27)
4. The Pros and Cons of Renting vs Ownership (Complete by May 1st)
 - a. Overview: desirability of owning versus renting (by 4/10)
 - b. Economic viability of owning rental units (by 4/17)
 - c. Tenant right to purchase programs (by 4/24)
 - d. Community land trusts (by 5/1)
5. Rental Costs (Complete by May 30th)
 - a. Utilities (by 5/8)
 - i. Rising cost
 - ii. How they are divided
 - iii. Energy conservation
 - iv. Local and national examples
 - b. Cable Television (by 5/15)
 - i. Cost of cable
 - ii. Cable regulation and choice
 - iii. Local and national examples

- c. Security Deposit and apartment rental costs (by 5/22)
 - i. Benefits and burdens to tenants
 - ii. Local and national models
- d. Government Programs (by 5/30)
 - i. Status and funding levels
 - ii. Need
 - iii. National examples

Final Product

At the end of the process, the committee will have prepared a bibliography of suggested readings for each of the above issues (including headings and subdivisions), as well as at least one policy suggestion for each major topic (numbers 1-5, not necessarily including sub-sections) and a ranking of policy priorities for each major topic (numbers 1-5, not necessarily including sub-sections).

Landlord/Tenant Communication and Ongoing Tenant Advocacy (Committee 3)

DRAFT – Work Plan

The committee had an initial meeting and the following objective and priority issues have been established. Assignments have been made in order to gather initial information required to further refine a final work plan. All initial assignments will be completed before the next meeting (2/9/09).

- I. Committee Objective: Review existing Landlord/Tenant laws, identify needs of tenants, analyze and determine unmet needs. Suggest solutions.
- II. Priority Issues:
 - A. Communication between landlords and tenants, between County and landlords/tenants, and with regard to language barriers.
 - B. Tenant education on rights and responsibilities, and how to access available resources.
 - C. Tenant advocacy structures.
 - D. Research on best practices.
 - E. Review of rental leases in use. Explore and consider the need for a mandatory “County-wide” lease, in order to reduce confusion.
- III. The committee will be gathering available information for dissemination among the group for review and analysis during the next scheduled committee meeting.
Information to include:
 - DHCA’s Landlord/Tenant Handbook
 - information on existing tenant advocacy groups and associations
 - existing laws
 - existing educational outreach
 - existing language and cultural barriers
 - leases commonly used
 - initial research on best practices
- IV. The committee will meet with DHCA’s Landlord/Tenant Manager for overview on County procedures and to address initial questions of the committee. (Meeting date to be scheduled.)